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The Fiscal Policy Of The CIA

Congressman Wright Patman, in the course of his deep probe of tax-exempt foundations, is giving the Central Intelligence Agency some embarrassment.

The congressman has turned up information, verified by the Internal Revenue Service, the CIA was giving money to the J. M. Kaplan Fund, a New York foundation. Or, as Patman put it, the Kaplan Fund was used "as a conduit for channelling CIA funds."

We don't know the purpose of this indirect use of taxpayer money, and probably don't want to know. We are not anxious to uncover the legitimately secret operations of the CIA.

But Patman asks why the CIA was spending tax money with a foundation which has been under intensive investigation by both his congressional subcommittee, and by the Internal Revenue Service. When Patman went to CIA for an answer, he didn't get it, he said. "I feel like I've been trifled with."

Two directors of revenue have recommended that the Kaplan foundation's tax-exempt status be revoked, and the Revenue Service is still probing.

It does not necessarily follow that whatever service the Kaplan Fund provided the CIA was not worth whatever CIA paid it. But somebody ought to know.

Congress should set up a watchdog committee to keep tabs on CIA and all the other hush-hush agencies. The public doesn't ask what they are doing, but the public has a right to believe that Congress knows what they are doing, and why.

This type of system has worked very well with the Atomic Energy Commission. It is even more important that there be a check on CIA and like agencies.

The more secret an agency, the more liberties it is likely to take — unless it is accountable to somebody who is accountable to the voters.